

## The Vampire 136

### Chapter 136 136: Zedya's Power

"This is a cruel place that you're standing," Zedya told Torsten, her voice growing rich with power while her eyes glowed brilliantly. Thane's Voice of Command could directly compel the truth but for her, she needed to draw her victim into a state similar to dreaming where her suggestions could reshape their world.

"It's a barren, empty place," she continued, building the dream world that Torsten would become trapped in. "In this place, you don't need to worry about what anyone else thinks. You don't need to worry about the rules of your ancestors or the ways of your people," she said. Several elders frowned at her but she continued anyway. "You only need to worry about the rules of the place that you're currently standing, here, with me."

"In this place, if you lie, your horn will shine as brightly as the sun and you will feel the pain of your horn being plunged into a bed of burning coals," she explained, watching his eyes begin to glow as he fell under her spell. "But this place isn't hopeless. There is a purple-eyed savior who can take away all the pain you feel if you are helpful to her. Do you want to be helpful?" Zedya asked sweetly, standing before the Frost Walker and placing her fingers gently under his chin tugging slightly down on the white fur of his short beard until he looked directly into her eyes.

"Helpful, yes," Torsten said, swaying slightly on his feet as though he was asleep.

"My Lord, this is wrong!" Paulus cried, desperately trying to find a way to put a stop to what was happening. "Can't you see that she's twisting his mind? Torsten is a strong warrior. After this, he will only be her puppet!"

"SILENCE!" Lord Ritchel roared, his voice shaking the walls as he stood up from his throne. "Speak again or do anything to interrupt and I will assume that you are guilty of everything they've said. Guards, if he speaks again, you will share his fate," he said, glowering at the men who surrounded Paulus.

Some of them, it seemed, were reluctant to act against an Elder but hearing Lord Ritchel's fury, even the most reluctant of them stiffened up their spines and drew their weapons, ready to subdue Paulus at an instant.

"It's good that you want to be helpful," Zedya purred, ignoring Paulus' antics while she focused on her task. She was pleased to see that Torsten had succumbed so quickly. Because most of them were accomplished sorcerers, Frost Walkers formed a certain resistance to her powers over time, but Torsten was both far too young and much too simple-minded to put up much of a fight, even if compared to someone like Hauke.

"Now," she said sweetly, turning his head lightly with her hand and pointing across the hall. "You see that wounded Tuscan over there? Please tell everyone what his name is and how long ago you met him?"

Zedya's question took everyone off guard. Wasn't she going to ask about who told him to collect Malte and leave the place they were supposed to patrol? Why would she ask about the wounded Tuscan?

"Not sure about his name," Torsten said, fidgeting slightly. He wanted to be helpful, he really did, but he wasn't sure about his answer! "Siquak, Silaq? Something like that," he said, his eyes shining as he hoped the purple-eyed savior would find his answer helpful. "He's not as important as Imnek so I'm not sure."

All around the council chambers, the room went still as people stared at him in horror. If they needed proof that he had colluded with the Tuscans, this was certainly a damning start!

"And how long ago did you meet little Siluaq?" Zedya asked, turning his gaze back to her. "Tell me the truth so I can help you."

"Six, no, seven years ago," Torsten said eagerly, excited that he knew the right answer this time. "The first time I saw him was seven years ago!"

"Tell everyone," Zedya said with a slow smile. "How is it that you met these Tuscans when you were so young? How is it that you're still alive today? I'm sure everyone wants to know."

"I was fishing with Grandfather and two other boys, Soren and Benj," Torsten began. "The Tuscans attacked. Grandfather made a deal. He gave them Soren and Benj to let us go. He promised to help them find others to hunt, to tell them when the caravans were leaving so they could set ambushes and he warned them when the scouts were searching for them."

As he spoke, several people shifted uncomfortably. Torsten's story, briefly told as it was, explained so many tragedies over the years that they didn't want to believe it could be true, but neither could they deny it. It was hard enough to reconcile the treachery with what they knew of Paulus, but hearing it from Torsten in such a cheerful tone, as if he was a school child eager to please his teacher, somehow made it even worse.

"How have you helped your grandfather with the Tuscans?" Zedya asked, gently stroking his furry face while the entranced Frost Walker stared deep into her eyes.

"At first, I didn't. I didn't even know. But, Grandfather is getting old," Torsten said, as though it was a very reasonable thing. "He needs me to carry messages out of the castle and sometimes to distract other guards and hunters so the Tuscans can slip by. This time he even..."

"Enough!" Ritchel shouted, his fur nearly standing on end as an icy wind swirled around him. "I've heard enough! Lady Nyrielle," Ritchel said, turning to face the impassive vampire and bowing deeply. "These two will be dead within an hour. Their horns will be ground to dust and scattered on the wind. I trust this justice will satisfy you and your fallen man?"

"No, it won't," Nyrielle said coldly. "My Ashlynn claimed their lives and horns. I will have both put to use."

"My Lord," Commander Jannik said uncomfortably. "I will execute these vultures myself if you order me to, but we do not sell our own as slaves."

"I said I would use their lives and horns," Nyrielle said darkly. Shadows danced around her body and her tongue flicked briefly over her fangs. The look she gave Paulus and Torsten was not unlike the look a connoisseur gave a fine bottle of wine or a well-prepared steak. "I never said I wanted them as slaves. Zedya, take them both. I will have instructions for you later."

"Lady Nyrielle," Lord Ritchel growled. "You are not in your Vale of Mists. This is the High Pass. We have our own ways to see justice done."

"Your council member sent assassins after my Seneschal," Nyrielle said sharply. "I'm being courteous by not treating it as an act of war between us. Do not test me, young Ritchel, we still have other matters to discuss tonight for which I will have answers."

Across the hall, no one dared to move. The icy pressure that Lord Ritchel exuded seemed to vanish in an endless abyss that surrounded Nyrielle, unable to ruffle so much as a strand of her hair. Paulus and

Torsten had both become bystanders, reduced to little more than gutted fish while the butchers argued over how to carve them.

Lord Ritchel would already endure significant pressure to step down after this incident. That Paulus had betrayed them so deeply and for so many years without being caught wasn't just something that doomed the scheming elder. By failing to detect it until now, it might doom Ritchel as well. If he could demonstrate his strength in the way he resolved matters, it would do much to maintain his power after the incident ended.

Nyrielle, however, was done honoring and respecting her young neighbor. He could be incompetent in his own realm as long as it didn't harm her or her people, but his incompetence had nearly cost her Ashlynn.

As far as she was concerned, she was being merciful by not claiming his own life and horn for his failures. In her mind, Ritchel needed to suffer a bit in this as well, and taking the guilty away from him to deal with as she pleased was a relatively mild rebuke, all things considered.

"Give them to her," an old, wizened voice said. The glassy eyed Old Svenja had said nothing during the entire proceeding but she spoke up now. "The ancestors care nothing for the lives or horns of these traitors. Let the Blood Princess do as she pleases."

"Old Svenja," Ritchel said, struggling to pull back his icy fierceness when he addressed the old woman who was closer to the ancestors than any of them. "Are you certain?"

"The Blood Princess is right," the old woman said. "We have more important things to discuss tonight," she added, standing slowly and moving to stand before Hauke. Her movements were slow and stiff but she needed no help from the young woman next to her to find the person she needed to address.

"You have been touched by the Ancestors," she said, not as a question, but as a statement. Others might not recognize the aura that clung to Hauke like frost clinging to fur but how could she miss it? "And you have brought something of them back with you. Now, my question is, will you admit to what you've done?"